



How to Evaluate Your Choices before Undertaking Alternative or Complementary Forms of Medicine

(Part 2 of 2 part series)

One need only walk into your friendly neighborhood drugstore or health food store to become overwhelmed with the possible adjunctive modalities that one can choose from. Many times consumers think if it is on the shelves of a pharmacy or health food store this ensures the effectiveness and safety of the product. Wrong! The internet and web are full of wondrous claims of

healings, but one has to be careful to approach these claims with skepticism and a sense of self-responsibility.

When faced with a debilitating disease or disorder you may want to “try everything” but **become an informed consumer** particularly before racing into any form of complementary or alternative therapy.

What are the facts?

- ✓ What research has been done that substantiates the benefits and adverse effects associated with the use of the proposed practices? (Do not rely on testimonies; **insist on scientific facts.**) Remember, if a therapy was having fantastic results it would be widely used and not kept a secret.
- ✓ Talk to your health care provider! He or she knows your diagnosis or disorder and can help you sort out the facts and coordinate your care should you choose to use a complementary form of treatment. This is particularly important since some forms of alternative or complementary therapies such as herbal products may interact and actually counteract the benefits of prescribed medicines and treatments. Generally your health care provider will be willing to consider trying a complementary therapy if he/she feels it beneficial.
 - Rely on authoritarian databases for your information:
 - Web MD - <http://www.webmd.com/>
 - Medline plus (National Library of Medicine) - <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>
 - CAM (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine) - <http://nccam.nih.gov/>
 - Pub Med- <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>
 - Nationally recognized data bases such as Mayo Clinic, Arthritis Association, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, etc.
 - Checking site information:
 - Who sponsors the site? A company selling products
 - Are the sources of the information cited listed
 - Watch for scientific facts and figures
 - Do not rely solely on testimonials
 - Is the information current
 - Has the information been reviewed by qualified professionals

- ✓ It is important to remember that just because something is available without a prescription or is labeled “natural” it does not mean it is harmless.
- ✓ The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cannot require testing of dietary supplements before they are marketed. . Go to <http://www.fda.gov> for information on dietary supplements.
- ✓ Be vigilant for claims that therapies can be used to substitute for conventional treatments such as metabolic therapies available in Mexico and mega doses of vitamins to cure cancer.
- ✓ Check with <http://www.ftc.gov> for any reported fraudulent claims regarding treatments.
- ✓ Payment for alternative or complementary forms of treatment may or may not be covered under insurance. Always check with your insurance provider before initiating therapy. Some therapy such as chiropractic treatments, if covered, may have a ceiling on the number of “adjustments” that will be covered.
- ✓ Indeed some complementary or alternative forms of therapy do offer consumers an enhanced or improved quality of life. Such things as massage therapy, meditation, music therapy and relaxation techniques have been of benefits to some individuals.
- ✓ Occasionally, after listening to a friend glowingly describe the great success of using a specific alternative or complementary therapy, such as a colon cleansing routine or magnetic therapy, you set out to investigate it for yourself. Suddenly you find yourself facing not only confusing terminology but claims that seem ‘too good to be true’, the first clue alerting you to be skeptical. In the end, even after research you’re still doubtful regarding the safety or effectiveness of using the treatment.

Finally, before undertaking complementary or alternative forms of medicine, you need to seek a person **legally registered** to prescribe these therapies. Osteopaths and chiropractors are regulated by a governing board. Osteopathic doctors (O.D.) are medical doctors who focus on treating the body, mind and spirit while incorporating the musculoskeletal system and manipulative treatment. (An O.D. doctor is legally licensed and equivalent to an M.D., medical doctor.)

Recognize that not everyone offering advice is qualified to do so. Walking into a health food store and talking to the clerk does not guarantee that he/she has proper credentials to be dispersing information. Reading a book, short term courses and week-end seminars do not substitute for the extensive education needed to be a herbalist or to offer advice on other forms of complementary or alternative forms of medicine. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true it probably is. Talk it over with your physician!

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